

**May 19, 2004DURBIN, SCHAKOWSKY SAY MEDICARE DISCOUNT DRUG PROGRAM
INFO MISLEADING; CALL FOR IMMEDIATE CORRECTION**

**MEDICARE MATERIALS OVERSTATE NUMBER OF ILLINOISANS ELIGIBLE FOR
DISCOUNT CARD ASSISTANCE**

BY MORE THAN 300,000WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today sent a letter to Medicare Administrator Mark McClellan calling on him to immediately take action to correct erroneous and misleading information regarding the number of seniors eligible to participate in the new Medicare Transitional Discount Card Transitional Assistance Program. Durbin and Schakowsky said that the issue first came to light because of large discrepancies between numbers provided by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and those provided by the Illinois Department of Public Aid (IDPA).

The federal government's "State Summaries" for the State of Illinois states that an estimated 310,000 Medicare beneficiaries in Illinois are eligible to participate in the Transitional Assistance Program. Transitional Assistance will provide seniors and other beneficiaries up to \$600 per year toward prescription drugs if their income is not more than 135 percent of the federal poverty line.

Durbin and Schakowsky noted that the 310,000 estimate by CMS is far higher than IDPA's official estimate that only 9,237 low-income individuals in Illinois would be eligible for discounts through the Transitional Assistance Program.

"Instead of passing a prescription drug bill that would have given Medicare the power to bargain down drug prices and make them affordable for seniors, the Bush Administration forced a vote on a very poor substitute bill - the first element of which is a Medicare drug discount card," said Durbin. "Now we find that the Administration is misleading seniors about the number of people really eligible for Transitional Assistance. We are saying it is time to be honest and level with seniors about the serious limitations of this program."

Schakowsky said, "Truth in advertising is a concept long ignored by the Bush Administration, especially when promoting the new Medicare drug law. We now have a preposterous claim by the Bush Administration that 310,000 low-income seniors in Illinois are eligible for up to \$600 for prescription drugs, when in reality that number is roughly 9,000 seniors. It's time for the White House to come clean about the Medicare Drug law to seniors in Illinois and across the country."

Under the new Medicare law, Medicare beneficiaries who currently have coverage through Medicaid are not eligible for the Transitional Assistance Discount Card Program. The State of Illinois provides drug coverage through the Medicaid program for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities with incomes at or below the federal poverty level. Illinois also provides comprehensive drug coverage to seniors with

incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level though its SeniorCare program. More than 500,000 Illinoisans have drug coverage through these two programs - which offer a more generous drug benefit than the \$600 per year available under the federal government's Transitional Assistance.

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In their letter, Durbin and Schakowsky asked McClellan to explain the more than 300,000 difference between the CMS estimate and that of IDPA. Durbin and Schakowsky wrote: "It is important to ensure the materials provided to beneficiaries are accurate and do not create additional confusion about the new law. We urge you to act immediately to correct this discrepancy with respect to Illinois and we also strongly recommend that you review your estimates with the appropriate agencies in other states to identify and correct any other inaccuracies that may exist."

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"These new Medicare drug discount cards are turning out to be bad news for seniors. First seniors were warned by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to "hold back" and not commit themselves to a particular program because they could end up with a discount today that disappears tomorrow. Now we are finding that the estimates of how many seniors are eligible for certain benefits under these cards are wildly exaggerated," said Durbin. "Seniors this prescription discount card is an election year promotion. They are not deceived by overpromising of this Administration."